

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LAGOS 08062 281605Z

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ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NIC-01 AID-20 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07

H-03 INR-11 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01

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R 281434Z AUG 74

FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5721

INFO AMCONSUL IBADAN

AMCONSUL KADUNA

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINS, SGEN, NI

SUBJECT: FMG THREATENS PRESS CRACK-DOWN

SUMMARY: FMG WARNINGS TO PRESS ABOUT STIRRING "SECTIONAL SENTIMENTS" ARE LATEST STEP IN EFFORTS DAMPEN EMOTIONS AROUSED BY CENSUS CONTROVERSY AND TARKA AFFAIR. END SUMMARY.

1. IN PREPARED PRESS STATEMENT ON AUGUST 27, POLICE INSPECTOR-GENERAL KAM SELEM REPEATED MORE STRONGLY EARLIER (AUGUST 16) IMPROMPTU ACCUSATION BY DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF HASSAN KATSINA THAT "SOME SECTIONS" OF PRESS WERE ENGAGING IN ACTIONS "CLEARLY DESIGNED TO CAUSE UNREST IN COUNTRY." SELEM WARNING APPEARED TO BE FOLLOW UP TO RECENT POLICE ACTION IN DETAINING SEVERAL JOURNALISTS AND AUTHORS INVOLVED IN CONTROVERSIAL PRESS CAMPAIGN SURROUNDING RESIGNATION UNDER NEWSPAPER ATTACKS FOR CORRUPTION OF FORMER COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSIONER JOSEPH TARKA (LAGOS 7916) -- CAMPAIGN WHICH IG CITED AS EXAMPLE OF PRESS ACTIVITIES CAPABLE OF "WHIPPING UP SECTIONAL SENTIMENTS." FMG, HE WENT ON, WOULD NOT BE BLACKMAILED AND "WOULD NO LONGER TOLERATE PRESS INDISCIPLINE." DESPITE "UNJUST" CHARGES OF ARBITRARY ARRESTS OF JOURNALISTS, SELEM DECLARED THAT POLICE

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PAGE 02 LAGOS 08062 281605Z

WOULD THEREFORE CONTINUE TO TAKE WHATEVER "DRASTIC AND

UNPLEASANT MEASURES" WERE NECESSARY TO CURB EXCESSES OF PRESS.

2. NEWSPAPERS HAVE NOT YET COMMENTED ON IG'S STATEMENT, BUT REACTION TO KATSINA ACCUSATION WAS ONE OF RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION, INSISTENCE THAT THE PRESS WAS SERVING ITS PEOPER FUNCTION, AND CLAIMS OF POPULAR SUPPORT.

3. COMMENT: SINCE END OF AMAKIRI TRIAL IN MARCH (LAGOS A-57) -- AND DESPITE CONTINUED POLICE DETENTION OF JOURNALISTS -- PRESS HAS BEEN AGGRESSIVELY EXPANDING BOUNDARIES OF PERMISSIBLE AREAS OF REPORTING. LATEST PRESS CAMPAIGNS ON TARKA AND ON PROVISIONAL CENSUS FIGURES (LAGOS 7282 AND PREVIOUS), HOWEVER, BY PLAYING UPON AND AGGRAVATING EXISTING NORTH/WEST ANTAGONISMS, HAVE ENTERED INTO AREAS IN WHICH FMG CLEARLY FEELS IT MUST SET LIMITS IN ORDER AVOID SERIOUS THREAT TO UNITY AND STABILITY. NOTWITHSTANDING ITS NORMAL EASY-GOING ATTITUDE, THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT THAT IN THIS INSTANCE FMG THREAT OF "DRASTIC MEASURES" IS NOT BLUFF. IT IS THUS LIKELY THAT NEWSPAPERS, WHILE PROTESTING THEIR INNONENCE, WILL CHOOSE TO BEHAVE AT LEAST FOR TIME WITH MORE CIRCUMSPECTION.

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